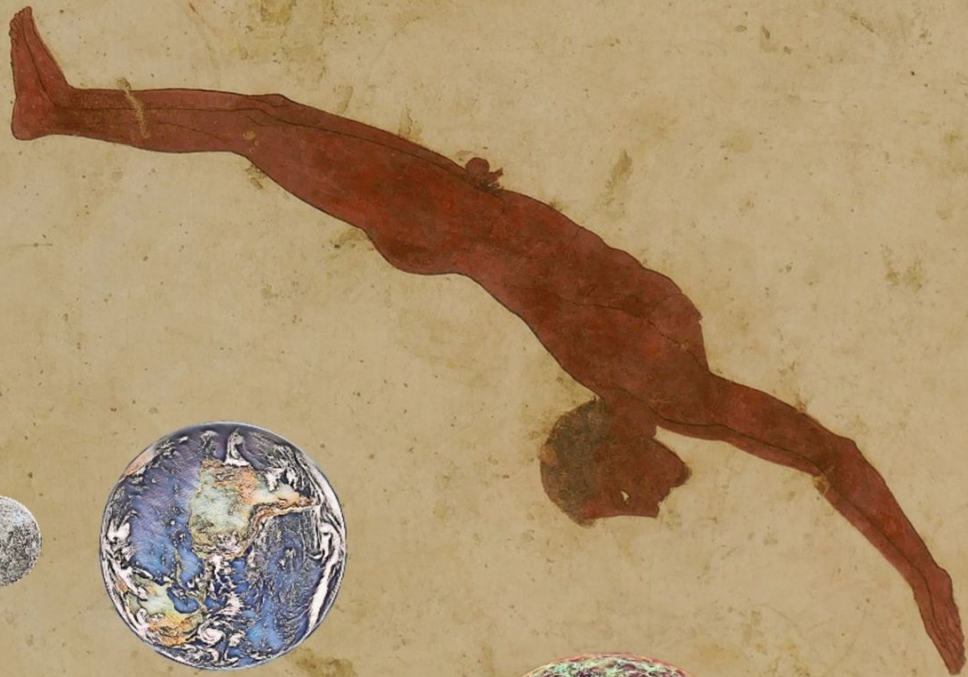
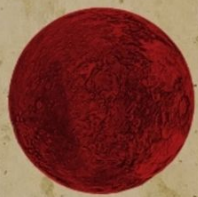


# ALONSO ARMSTRONG



Henry Valentine



Alonso  
Armstrong

HENRY VALENTINE

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## EARTH

Alonso Armstrong appeared out of air  
And ambled down a market aisle where  
He hoped to find sustenance for his void.  
He scanned the shelf while radios annoyed.  
Animal flesh was froze in cardboard gloves.  
The Supremes shrieked "Stop in the Name of Love."  
Alonso was a new guy, fresh from school.  
Wavy black hair. Preppy, sexy, and cool.  
Polo and cap toe vegan leather boots.  
Partially phosphorescent at his roots

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

As a result of his jumping through space.  
He shimmered blue, digits to toes to waist.  
He had his big hair all done up with paste.  
He turned the corner to a different case.  
The frozen vegetables would suit his needs.  
He gathered bags into his arms with speed  
And passed five dollars toward the cashier kid.  
He slipped outside the market walls and hid  
Within a line of athletes who all marched  
Onto a bus which skidded sped and barged  
Its way to the spring school soccer fest.  
Alonso's own physique matched all the rest-  
At the academy they pushed his will,  
Tearing his cells to make him stronger built.  
The coed adolescents shared their gum  
And played the doors and green day on the drum.  
Alonso jumped the bus into nettles,  
Regained his step, and searched for a kettle,  
Fire, stool to sit, and spoon to stir his broth.

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

He spun tooth floss round twigs and lit them both.

While gathering all his things, he saw the town,

But those details can be left out for now.

His residual light was fading now.

He smiled as he ignited fallen boughs

And hand rolled cigarettes of wild clove.

He placed a cast iron pot upon his stove

Which he found abandoned near railroad tracks

With moss and frogs jumping up down and back

Who found their way in from the dirty creek.

Alonso brushed it out and fried a leak,

Then slowly poured his bags and water too.

He perched upon the stool tending his stew.

He perched, like pagan vulture over prey

Into the night but still with light of day.

At five o clock he sipped the elixir

With thrift store china and a light fixture

That flickered soft against his olive skin

He felt revived and so he glowed again

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

Not from the cosmic jump but out of mirth.  
He'd never jumped before; this was his first.  
The spatial jumping course took many years,  
But that was not the subject of his fears.  
The classes which Alonso hated most  
Reflected badly on his end-year notes  
And taught of Cleopatra and Caesar,  
Queen Lizzy, Genghis Khan and Russian czars.  
They took classes on world domination.  
Taking the jump marked his graduation,  
A god of sorts in search of worlds to take,  
With dark implications which made him shake.  
Alonso wasn't quite the ruling kind.  
He smoked clove cigarettes to clear his mind  
On the playground while schoolmates plotted stars  
And screamed voraciously, "Those will be ours!"  
Poor Alonso was happy just to be.  
All he really wanted was somebody  
Like him to be with and be happy too,

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

And thus, his whole being had turned to blue,

The textbook color of a space jumper.

Another student leapt concurrently,

But not to Earth, and with more certainty

About the daytrips and conquests they'd make.

There's more to say on this, but first a break

To report on new things Alonso's seen.

Finished with soup, he now could clear his head.

With a new world came a new colored lens.

Alonso felt surprised immersed in green,

Compared to his first realm. (The school was grey.)

Earth people spent days in refreshing ways--

They cooked and drove and drummed so civilized.

They didn't perch by fires, they ate french-fries.

Alonso's realm ate grey vitamin mush.

On earth they lived to admire taste and touch.

He unlaced and placed soles on lush green grass,

He grinned and with delight he plopped his ass.

Scrutinizing the stars, he found his own.



ALONSO ARMSTRONG

He cursed it, and with middle finger shown,  
He sang "There's many new places to roam!"  
Out of all these planets he'd choose a home.

Alonso fell asleep fearlessly sprawled.

He was trained to conquer worlds, after all.

A proud lion basking is what he was,

And yet beguiled by dandelion fuzz.

In morning, he wandered to a diner,

And was met by sweet Paige with eyeliner.

She greeted, "Hey there, sir. What will it be?"

He said, "I'll take the burger without beef."

"Alright hun, that's weird but we'll get it made."

With french-fries and a barbecue cascade

To top the sandwich, it was a delight.

He returned for seconds later that night.

Paige Inquired if he'd like something new.

She pointed toward a member of the crew.

A short man in an apron and green crew.

He smiled, "I'll make something special for you,"

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

Behind the counter with barstools to sit,  
Patting his soft brown bangs that curled a bit.  
The cook was slender framed, pleasantly lean  
With cordial, happy eyes the color green.  
Alonso beamed, "I'd like that very much."  
"So, where you from?" grabbing a pan, he blushed.  
"I just finished prep school," Armstrong digressed.  
"I didn't finish school," the cook confessed,  
"All that I wanted was to be a chef."  
"You knew what you set out to do and left,"  
Said Alonso, "I think that's really cool."  
"And what'll you do now you're done with school?"  
The stranger asked. Alonso clenched his chest,  
"So, what's your name?" He once again digressed.  
"Alexei Moreno," Alexei said.  
"I like your name, Alexei," Armstrong said,  
"Alonso Armstrong." He lowered his head  
So his eyes met the cook's, whose cheeks weren't red,  
But a pinkish hue which spread through his face.

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

Alonso smiled, "How about a taste?"

"It's not done yet. Hello, Alonso. No."

"What do you do when you're done and go home?"

"I read cookbooks, write, and test recipes.

Besides that, I learn Spanish and Chinese."

"If you don't mind, can I ask when you're done?"

"I don't mind," the cook said, lifting a thumb,

"I get done in one hour. And how 'bout you?

If it's you left alone, what do you do?"

"I like to travel to unique places,"

Armstrong answered as Alexei plated

The dish: vegan Swedish meatballs and spuds.

And pushed it toward Alonso with a nudge.

The nuggets swam in savory gold sauce

With a drizzle of berry coulis tossed.

Alonso tried a morsel and was glad.

"This is the best damn thing I've ever had."

It recalled the sensory part of life.

"It's very good," he took another bite.

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

"Hey, do you smoke?" he asked once he was done.

Alexei said, "I don't, but I'll try one,"

And hung his apron up. Alonso leapt

Out of his seat. Together both men left.

Armstrong said, walking backward in the lot,

"You don't have to smoke if you'd rather not,"

And tucked the pack of cloves into his jeans.

"What, just wanted more time to talk with me?"

"I guess so. I hope that's alright with you."

They leaned against a fence of metal tubes.

Moreno nodded. They grappled the fence,

Gaping their noses to the evening's scents.

Said Alonso, "I have some more to say

About the way I spend my summer days.

I've space but I don't know how to spend it

Now life has started and my school's ended."

The cook asked, "What do you want most right now?"

"I want to enjoy simple things somehow,

And do odd jobs to keep me fed this month."

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

Armstrong lived just to savor summer suns.

Moreno said, "Swell. Have you got a girl?"

"I don't," Armstrong clenched wall with fingers curled,

"I've never dated any girl or guy."

"So you like both. Well guess what, so do I."

Staring him in in the eyes, Alonso smiled,

"I'm glad that's cleared up. It took a while.

I think you're really handsome, by the way.

If I asked your number, what would you say?"

"I'd say I think you're really handsome too,

And to feel free to call to see me soon."

Alonso asked, "Want to look at the stars?"

"That's a cliché, but yes. I love the stars."

They stepped out to a grass lot with no cars.

Alexei spoke boldly, "Nothing is ours."

"What do you mean?" Armstrong asked with regard.

"Joan of Arc and James Dean had these same stars."

"That makes it more special though, doesn't it?

Shared sensory events and all that shit?"

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

"I think so, anyway," the cook laughed out,  
"I think there's nothing special life's about,  
We're here just to enjoy the sensations,  
And meet people with the right vibrations  
Who make us feel unique and special too,  
Like Joan of Arc, James Dean, or me or you."

"You give me good vibrations, Alexei."

"My hands are scarred from work. Compare with me."

Armstrong stretched his left hand up from the grass.

Alexei's hand veered to the right and clasped.

Alonso felt vibration butterflies.

He lost track of the stars and closed his eyes.

Warm Earthling flesh pressed soft against his own.

"It's getting late. I need to get back home,"

Moreno said, fare welling with a squeeze,

And stood, Alonso's shoulders at his knees,

"Tomorrow, want to see me at my place?"

"I'd like that very much," Armstrong's head raced

With everything he and his friend might do.

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

Alonso tossed and turned that night till two,  
Thinking of smocks and boxers to unstring,  
Or less amorous moves made in the spring,  
Like loafing with him in a glade, reading.  
Engrossed, burning lovesickness was his thing.  
In morning he ate sweet baked beans on toast  
At a truck stop called "Bigger, Better, Most!"  
He smoked, washed up, blew his hair, took a piss  
And taxied to the one he'd like to kiss.  
Colin Young cried for his sweet "Buttercup."  
The driver spun a bright blue Ford pickup.  
He was called Paul. A flannel made him soft  
Despite his ruggedness, proudly aloft.  
His voice was rich gravel without a cough.  
He liked to hunt and fish on his time off.  
He asked, "Going to see a lady friend?"  
Alonso was in no mood to pretend.  
"No, sir. I'm going to go and see my man."  
"Shucks, all I've got back home's a Doberman."

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

"I love Dobermans," Alonso exclaimed.

He'd never seen a dog despite this claim.

They pulled up to the house. Alonso knocked.

Alexei greeted him, "The door's unlocked."

They paced and met in the clean, plain foyer.

Moreno led his guest past the boiler,

The kitchen, and the room with books and paint.

It smelled like soap, without a single stain.

He fell into a rope hammock and laid,

Centered within a polygon of shades,

A windowed room where all the blinds were shut.

Alonso sauntered in but did not strut.

He'd never done a tryst like this before.

A phonograph and records lined the floor

Along the wall, creating a border.

A handsome man lounged while he crept forward,

Accommodating him, "Do you like noise?"

Armstrong set the machine to the Beach Boys

And sat with him inside the big hammock.



ALONSO ARMSTRONG

"That's the most perfect thing that you can pick,"

Alexei laughed. "Good Vibrations" commenced.

They loved each other till they were content.

As Armstrong left the porch, Alexei asked,

"Alonso, are you ever coming back?"

"Of everything I've seen you are the best.

I have some things to sort, but after, yes."

Alonso kissed his friend firm on the lips,

Setting on a new path with splits and dips.

He traipsed 10 miles until he hit a wood.

Fronds bade, "Come in." He surmised that he should.

Along a stream, tracing trees with his hand,

Alonso spied a man and Doberman

Casting their twine into the blue channel.

The fisherman lit a beeswax candle

To light the crisp night that hastily fell.

The large dog had no leash, he behaved well.

Alonso asked, "Can I stand with you two?"

"I don't mind," said the man, "and how 'bout you?"

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

The men blinked at the dog, who said nothing.

"How did you begin fishing and hunting?"

"Maybe when I set up driving taxi.

It's relaxing and feeds Kazak and me.

From what I've heard, fish is good for your mind."

"Compared to factories, it's much more kind.

They have no idea that they will be slayed.

I like your dog and his name, by the way."

"Tell me honest. You got somewhere to stay?"

"I slept just fine in the field yesterday."

"I'll take you home with me, if that's okay,

But not like your gentleman. I'm not gay."

Alonso nodded, "Thank you, Paul. You're good."

"So, where you from? What brought you to the woods?"

"You'll think I'm ill, but I will tell you still.

I left a planet where I lacked free will,

Like chalk to cheese to this locale I've seen.

I like the trees and green vitality."

"Your space travel isn't so new to me.

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

There's actually a sign you'll have to see,"

Paul passed Armstrong a bag filled up with fish.

The men followed Kazak, who's docked tail swished

On into Paul's pickup. Alonso said,

"You're kind to people who you've never met."

"I'm kind to people who I'd like to know.

I can't help if they're everywhere I go."

"Still, I think that's the only trait with pull-

All that matters is how you treat people.

That's what makes someone cool and interesting.

I want to be like that, never rusting,

Staying electric despite circumstance."

"Anyone can be like that, sure," Paul glanced,

Pointing toward a roadside billboard that read:

"J. May's Railroad to Mars," all caps, in red.

Paul said, "There's lots of folks now boarding it."

Armstrong knew the name. He grimaced, "Well, shit."

Alonso had a rival while in school

Named José May. May truly wished to rule,

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

Unlike Armstrong, who wanted to escape.

Each competed to be in premier shape

And leap to the most distant checkpoint zones.

Armstrong was best, but May could hold his own.

They pranked comrades, jumping into locked rooms.

Burned calories meant more mush meals consumed.

Cosmic jumps dwarfed those juvenile leaps leapt.

May perhaps jumped soon after Armstrong left

To propagate his Martian colony.

"May cannot do any task honestly.

I wouldn't trust a J. May bicycle.

A rickety Mars train, a lie cycle,

A racket to steal Earth people's free will-

Call May's bad new invention what you will,

I sense something corrupt about all this,"

Alonso said, red in the face and pissed.

Paul said, "I take it that you know this guy."

"We went to school. He's trained to con and lie."

"Maybe you could try and change his ways."

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

"Yes. God, you're right. I might," Alonso praised,

"I knew that. I just didn't want to go.

I planned to anyway to see things though.

I wanted to see Earth, Mars, and Venus,

And decide which one of them suits me best,

All while relaxing under summer suns.

I didn't know Mars would get overrun.

Also, I revel in the outlook here."

Paul grinned wide as he continued to steer,

"You can stay here as long as you decide."

Kazak nuzzled against Alonso's side.

Paul pulled in front of his blue clad house.

The sleeping Doberman had to be roused.

They hauled all of Paul's stuff to his car stall.

They flumped on stools. Paul chucked Kazak a ball.

"You hungry?" Paul packed up and stowed his rod.

Alonso, grieving bagged fish, gave a nod.

"If you like, I'll do my signature dish,

Olive-oil-lemon-garlic-style Baked fish,

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

Piled high with herbed wild rice and cranberry."

"Thank you for the rice, but no fish for me,"

Armstrong paled. He feared sounding impolite.

"Alright. You'll have a beer with me though, right?"

Armstrong sat tight, grinning, "I will. Beer's good."

He'd never sipped a beer but hoped he would.

Armstrong's sip smacked of sapid paint thinner.

Similar to his first jump's blue shimmer,

It came like a barrage but pleasantly.

The dog peeked at his bowl expectantly.

Paul scooped Kazak ground fish from a tureen.

His tail wagged like Armstrong had never seen.

"Do you not eat any protein from meat?"

Paul asked to learn what meals his friend could eat.

"I don't eat any meat, dairy, or eggs."

"I'll serve the rice with beans- yellows and reds,

And greens to make a three-bean salad side,

Enough to keep both of us satisfied,"

Paul pickled three untinned legumes with zest,

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

Then spooned his fluffed pressure pot rice to test.

Paul lent Alonso his green pasta bowl,

"Take and eat this up. Here's a spoon to dole.

A humble meal but fit enough to serve."

"The food looks swell and more than I deserve,"

Alonso asserted, sinking his fork

And spooned his own rice with athletic torque,

Masticated, and swallowed with gusto.

Paul lifted his guitar from its dust coat

Once their plates cleared and robust hunger dulled

And strummed "And I love her" by the Beatles.

"You're very good," Alonso praised. Paul bowed.

The guest hinted, "I wish I could learn how."

The guitar headed onto Armstrong's hips.

Paul led its strings toward fledgling fingertips,

Each of which he oriented in place.

Armstrong excelled, just like a space jump ace,

With glowing digits. Armstrong admired Paul,

And had no real desire to leave at all.

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

He contemplated love for Alexei,  
For whom it was enough to simply be,  
And all the rare avians he'd lit on,  
Relishing every sense under the dawn.  
At dawn, set up in quilts upon Paul's couch,  
He yawned and blue glow spilled out from his mouth.  
Withdrawn, he traversed Paul's dewed lawn barefoot,  
Resolved to stomp J. May's sovereign pursuit.  
Armstrong's roots now matched his digits in blue.  
Blue all through, he leapt to May's train station.  
Alonso boarded. No hesitation.  
He'd said goodbye to grey, now goodbye green.  
There were two more planets he'd not yet seen.  
Reclined in bed, he read Symposium  
And sped, minding love with rap music on.  
On landing, staff slung riders a ham feast.  
Alonso fasted rather than harm beasts.  
On Earth he felt he was one with the plains.  
Now he set soles on Martian red rust stains.



ALONSO ARMSTRONG

With disdain, Armstrong marched from the depot,

Into May's town, starved for a burrito.

Signs on both sides advertised J.M. Pork.

He beheld piglets and inferred pitchforks,

Arabellas, and follies of that sort.

"Hell yes! I was expecting you, old sport!"

José extolled with broad extended arms,

"If you will, let me show you 'round my farm?"

The tycoon wore grey flannel suits and suede.

His form was fit and brown topped with a fade.

"Okay," Armstrong said as May led the way

Off of sienna iron oxide clay

And onto plastic golf course style green turf

"It's hideous-- It's vile next to Earth.

It's inception. We can't have everything,"

José passed over an electric string,

"You cast a notion on me to succeed."

A boar, mounting his sow girl, cast his seed.

"You're somehow making me feel liable.

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

In fact, I find this unadvisable--  
Eating up warm life forms to get your fill,"  
Said Alonso, self-sworn to never kill.  
"Boo-hoo. I bet you'd rather eat grey mush,"  
Said May. A runt lapped milk with its tongue brush  
Beyond the second gate, wrapped round the neck  
By his thirsty sibling who also pecked.  
Alonso felt fiercely peckish himself  
And smoked to sate his space jump hunger spell.  
"On Earth I eat nuts, seeds, grains, and legumes  
Companioned with fruit, roots, greens, and mushrooms  
Prepared by companions. That is, until,  
I fear, you lure and snatch up their free will."  
"Going on with that vegan claptrap still.  
And who said anything about free will?  
I keep my workers free range like the pigs.  
They can start families and construct digs."  
Porkers on the next turf noshed supplement  
And idled on the wide, green draped cement.

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

José patted a porker's wiry hide,  
"He's my favorite." The porker smiled wide.  
Vitamin grains slid down pipes into cups.  
"A hydroponic corn system's set up--  
Their poo and pee get rinsed down slanted turf,  
And sent through drainpipes to tanks which reserve  
The nutrients for use in our greenhouse.  
It's down this way. Want to go see it now?"  
"Skipping the slaughter room, I see. Too dark?"  
"Well, no-- I just know you won't like that part."  
They slipped through to a glassy garden dome.  
White silky columns of corn recalled Rome  
Framed between cypress and stone Diana.  
Fresh green stocks rose past May's diorama  
in substrate trays fed by stone aqueducts.  
To churn out ambrosia in goblet cups,  
Blades chopped the grain and sent it through a mill.  
Beyond that mill fresh whiskey was distilled,  
Nectar of choice to workers in the bars.

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

Besides that, corn brewed ethanol for cars.

"And why not capture Earth? You had the skill."

"I knew that you'd like Earth and its free will."

"Your maize is nice," Alonso admitted.

His aims realized, José smiled but hid it,

"That's not all. I have something to show you."

In an attached dome, Earthling produce grew.

May led through pillared halls toward a long zone

Of hydroponic plots for Alonso,

"I wanted ample fare for you to choose.

It has nuts, seeds, legumes, grains, and produce."

Altars hailed the horned god and his mistress.

To regale Armstrong in his starved distress

A steward laid a range of vegan cheese,

crackers and figs. He conceded to feast.

"Do you remember our school days, Armstrong?

I recall summer months spent on the lawn

Of grey pavement that crunched our cartilage.

You'd tag my arm and race me to the ridge.

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

We'd conquer crashing crystal pearl pool waves."

"You called the rocks we dried on 'sea god's graves,'"

Armstrong sauntered past barrels of fine wine

To run his hands along the stems and vines,

Feeling the wheat, grapes, and Grecian olives.

"It takes love to know what complete love is,"

Said Alonso, "And you're in love with me."

"So what if I am?" May said with defeat,

"With that I became more than what I was."

May's rapt statement inspired an abrupt pause.

"I've realized I don't think your heart's undone.

You don't need to love all parts of someone

In order to love them," Armstrong whispered.

"How do you think of my heart then?" May purred.

"Where's somewhere I can look at the sunset?"

"Up this ladder," José's hands slipped from sweat.

Alonso stepped, "You're grown yet fear the sun."

"I fear all stars. They see all that is done

And mark me with grim pock like freckle spots."

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

"You're fine with spots," joining May in a box  
Of glass, Armstrong welcomed the beaming star.  
May's city stretched horizons digs to bars.  
"José May, you truly have an empire,"  
Said Alonso, in awe and not on fire,  
No longer pissed, as far as May could see.  
"Alonso, want to go see a movie?"  
With Armstrong's nod, they descended the rungs,  
Maneuvering through raspberry vines unstung  
And into a fine fast cherry mustang,  
And wore no seatbelts while car alarms rang.  
Rodger Miller crooned out May's red machine.  
They reached the cinema, met by James Dean  
And Marilyn in Cardboard perfection  
Whose taped voice spoke with breathy inflection  
directions: "Welcome to the bass theater,  
Insert film beneath seat and press return."  
Loudspeakers stretched beyond the cutout boards  
And past bookshelves where classic films were stored,  
Delivering deep beats to twelve private rooms.

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

Locals decompressed, delved by bangs and booms

Surrounding them, resounding in their seats.

"Which picture for you?" José queried sweet.

"For me? That's hard. I am a virgin yet,"

Armstrong touched Star Wars. He and May's eyes met

Which meant the alien's choice was in good taste.

"This theater's novel. It plays only bass--

An acoustic delight for your first show."

In darkness, they felt struck by every blow

And put licorice into each other's mouths.

Armstrong grinned, glad how this friendship played out.

May grasped his hand as they left the movie,

"I love you Alonso, so rule with me."

Alonso accused, "You type casted me.

I'm not the ruling kind. I'm feathery."

"I long to meet someone," he freed his wrist,

for whom it is enough to just exist."

He embraced May, "I'm glad that you're my friend."

Beaming, Armstrong shined cold light end to end

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

And flittered, flickering like blue neon.

His slippery specter smoldered till gone

And slid to the next star with suave freeness.

He'd faced grey, green, red, and now rose Venus.

The Earth Alonso loved coursed toward summer.

Alonso perched on Venus to be sure

That his awe was not merely circumstance.

The rose planet's cacti pierced through his hands.

The space jump left free space in his stomach

He filled with violets, roses, and lilacs

From a garden of coarse spined grass and gates.

An obelisk stood with reflective plates

Opposite in the yard from where he grazed.

Armstrong meandered through the lilac maze

Musing on grandeur, romplings, and friendship,

Hesitantly wanting to end his trip

And yet enthralled by flora like a hound,

Pricking his ears, exploring touch and sound.

Shrubs stretched to form corridors with stone busts



ALONSO ARMSTRONG

And flowers cloning Earth's but more robust.  
Metal screeches chimed rhythmic, high and low,  
From the obelisk, far past Alonso  
Who probed though hassled by mechanic rasps.  
He found a cache with mounded walnuts trapped.  
Shucking shells on the ground with fists, he snacked,  
But frowned as a wolfish squirrel attacked.  
The space rodent was slight and muscular  
With mauve toned barb like bristles as its fur.  
Its teeth pierced, passing Armstrong a virus.  
Bearing the sting where his thick thumb wine gushed,  
He staggered toward the obelisk although  
Fever flushed flowers fused from vertigo.  
Alonso knocked against the mirrored glass.  
Past two-way plates where Armstrong couldn't glance  
Were skylights and a hanging chain swing chair.  
A strange girl with estranged parents swung there,  
Called Victoria Orange of Venus.  
She quit the swing, ending the chain screeches

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

And glided forth with vials for first aid.  
Armstrong winced from her needle interlaid  
Within the muscle tissue he once built.  
With a sardonic smile, she watched him wilt.  
He rose to grieve filleted squirrels on spits.  
"Once they're done, I can serve you some of it,"  
Victoria sipped from a small steel cup,  
"It's economic, lean, and fills you up."  
"You're kind, but that wouldn't sit right with me."  
"Then lie back and drink up some scarlet tea."  
He supped as she drizzled sauce on the meat,  
A sweet barbeque lake tasty to eat.  
She was brown haired, brown eyed, and swell bodied  
And talked with certain, primal majesty.  
"Tell me, how does someone come to live here?"  
He asked flustered, the benefits unclear.  
Venus sizzled with points, lavish with pain.  
After some thought, Victoria explained,  
"I have no shame and won't apologize,

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

But typically, I'm much more modernized.

Circumstance has detached me from my den."

"I see. And what name should I call you, then?"

"I'm Victoria Orange of Venus."

"I'm very honored to have met you, miss.

My name's Alonso Armstrong of Grey Void."

"I know that type too well," she said, annoyed,

"My father went to the academy.

He tried to push his base ideals on me

And condescended that I might rule too.

Instead, I said 'I'll be a bard for you.'

He's vain, so he agreed. In his delight,

He built this obelisk where I might write

And banished me until his epic's done.

I'm faithful that my father loves no one."

Alonso spoke to satisfy his gripe,

"I'll tell you now, I'm nothing like that type.

I left not fixed to reign, but fixed to see,

And principally, I left just to be free."

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

"And what then brought you to my tall diggings?

"I yearn to seek and sense exotic things."

"You can't get more exotic than Venus."

"Quite true. I prefer Earth and its greenness."

"That's intriguing, but I'll never desert,"

She said and passed him shorts and a t-shirt.

Alonso washed behind her dressing screen,

"I said I like to seek out life's beauty,

So what do you like, more than anything?"

"I write and write and write and write and write.

Of Venus and my loves who shine so bright."

Armstrong dried and perfumed his hair with rose,

And came back to the yard in summer clothes.

The night became. They strolled as it grew dim.

"My father's corrupt, so I'll replace him."

Victoria declared, sharp pearl teeth shown.

Alonso smiled, "An empire overthrown.

Tell me, how do you intend to prevail?"

"As I promised, I'll draft his epic tale,

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

But scribe my father with his fatal flaw--

Egoism. Admirers will withdraw

And cringe at his fake exploits with the gods,

And how he served himself against all odds

When faced with minotaurs, sirens, faeries,

Wyverns, and those who desired to stay free.

It's writers who found history, you know--

An oligarchy electing the throne."

They reached the garden's end, to where cars passed.

"Tell me the best two lines you've written last."

"King Orange emancipated the gnomes,

Then severed all their heads and burned their homes,"

Victoria laughed her head off with glee.

"If you'd like, head to the malt shop with me,"

She pointed with her shoulder down the street.

"Your lore invokes the audience with gasps,

Then strikes bitter like Cleopatra's asps,"

Armstrong admired the sign, ready to eat.

It lit up velvet neon in the dark,

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

In stark contrast to the land-- violent sharp,  
With violet volcanoes for its skyline.  
The signboard boasted smoothies for a dime,  
Sundaes, and hotdogs made with J.M. pork.  
Dancing backward, traversing the car park,  
Orange stepped with the stereo in sink.  
Michael sang about some pretty young thing.  
Inside, the soda jerk, crew cut and clean,  
Said, "Your beauty's like an Egyptian queen's."  
She said, "Thanks, Hank. Cherry cola, I think."  
Alonso picked a thick banana drink.  
"Alonso, have you ever been in love?"  
She took a stool and tapped the quartz above.  
"I have, and you?" He diverted to her.  
She intervened, "With somebody from Earth?"  
"Yes, I met a man there named Alexei  
Who shares the same philosophy as me."  
"Another man? That's kind of interesting."  
She made her rose cigar start glistening.

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

Armstrong lit up an Earth born, space bound clove.

"If you love him, why the hell would you rove?"

Orange asked, partly bitter in her voice.

"I wanted to be certain of my choice--

That I desire Earth, not just Alexei."

Victoria bit into a cherry,

"If I loved once like that, I'd never leave."

"It's hard to meet someone when you're unique,

With whom you share novel leisure pursuits."

"I've dreamt I'll never find someone I suit.

Uniqueness pales. All that counts is kindness.

Worldviews and how you treat others must mesh.

On Venus, that's a scarce commodity.

I've stumbled on some once or twice but he

Would always be soaked in his vanity,

Narcissus the night shining, drowning me."

"I completely agree," said Alonso,

"But there's many more loves out there to know."

"I know," Victoria spit out her pit,

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

"Besides, there's lore to forge, and I'm on it."

"I'll help write the libel, if you don't mind."

"Of course. We'll get it done in half the time!"

About that time's when all the lions came  
And police cars blocked up the fast-food lane.

Officers wriggled through the partition  
While hungry blonde maned beasts clawed doorways in.  
"We'll go through the back door. They're not that bright."

They slid right by. Victoria was right,

"I think the lions all are just for show.

It's scare tactics to make them seem less slow."

She and Armstrong ran for the obelisk,

"I go out every night, taking the risk."

"I'd do the same in Grey Void, just for sport.

They didn't have lions. They'd teleport.

With my friend, I'd climb monuments or swim.

I felt I'd conquer anything with him,"

Alonso slipped off his new moccasins

Of canvas Victoria gifted him



ALONSO ARMSTRONG

From a drawer full of her ex-boyfriend's things.  
He stretched out on the hardwood by her swing.  
Orange clicked her tower's two-way plates shut  
And tiptoed barefoot to the cushioned hut  
With green silk curtains where she slept at night.  
She belted him to start a pillow fight.  
In returned feathered flight, he dodged and struck,  
Lodging a blow right to her breast with luck.  
She fanned quilts on which he could stretch, and  
Armstrong smiled, resting upon soft weapons.  
"Goodnight, Alonso," Orange closed her shroud.  
At sunrise she brushed teeth and hair and prowled,  
Pinning clothes and gardening in the yard  
Armstrong sunbathed and waited for the bard,  
Dolled up his hair, and lolled on her hard floor.  
Victoria joined. Light gleamed from the door  
And pale through apertures over the swing.  
They lit cigarettes and began writing.  
They wrote and wrote and wrote and wrote and wrote,

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

Scrawling lines, sitting crisscross, passing notes.  
Orange and Armstrong worked, charged by red tea,  
In violet and green ink respectively,  
Reciting shared rhymes in silvery tones.  
Inflectional gravity nipped their bones  
Past gold into Venusian brown (blue) hour.  
On break from drafting, they left their tower  
And broke fasting with burgers neat to eat,  
His of bean, hers of local squirrel meat.  
They flirted with handsome Hank at the bar  
And ran again from lions and cop cars.  
Habitually hooked past curfew victuals  
Would end each book compiling ritual.  
They wrote and dined and raced and stayed uncaught,  
And thus, while dinners changed, the days did not.  
Lions drew nearer to the obelisk.  
Victoria was unmoved by the risk.  
"There we go. We've finally finished it.  
Now all that's really left is to edit."

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

"I think we should work quickly all the same--  
It appears we have been sieged by blonde manes,"  
Armstrong nodded toward lions pawing glass.  
They finished before sharp claws could trespass.  
Alonso clasped the epic in his arms.  
"Time to depart," she grinned to his alarm.  
She tugged her swing to relieve Armstrong's doubt,  
"We'll climb this chain and take the skylight out."  
At the top was a zip line she had rigged  
To resemble guywire, cleverly hid.  
Police and cats bashed on to gain access.  
They skipped to tell sweet Hank of their success.  
Hank inquired after serving the drive thru,  
"Tell me, what is it you saucy dolls do?  
If I were asked, I'd say you're movie stars."  
After letting Hank light up her cigar,  
Orange grinned wide, inordinately glad,  
"We've written this epic to slam my dad,  
But we're not sure how to distribute it."

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

She passed the script, and he gave it a go.

"That's interesting-- I broadcast radio.

I'm trying to produce new teleplays.

What do you think of airing it today?"

On lunch, Hank led them to the studio.

They punched each line out with dramatic flow,

Alternating between three fine timbres

In joint effort to flip the king fingers,

Splintering his name with Hank's clicking send.

"Everyone's on at lunch. He's met his end,"

Said Hank. Each writer kissed him on the cheek.

"Your chemistry makes me wistful and week,"

He shook both hands. They took a town bound route.

"What will Hank do now that your epic's out?"

Asked Armstrong. They passed a cactarium.

"Hank's now a malefactor, so he runs,

But not for long. He'll hide for just a week.

My epic's now unconscious history."

"And what will you do with your work complete?"

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

"I'll rent a quiet room with food to eat.

To inspire rioting, I'll pen speeches.

Once I'm free, I'll keep chronicling Venus."

"We have different notions of a swell time.

All I can think about's our functions, like

Consumption, loving, lust, and exercise,

And the senses that those pursuits comprise.

I met a man who's just like that somehow.

I can't defer leaving much longer now

And prefer Earth, but also care for you."

"I'm touched, but that's just what you'll have to do.

We meet, but like steaming comets, we stray.

People love, crash, and leave, and that's okay.

I'll write novels on Venus in your lieu

And you'll love an Earthling who thinks like you

Who lives his life to feel and makes you glow.

I love you, but I'll be fine if you go."

Alonso clasped her hand and kissed it slow,

"You're someone sweet I'm glad I got to know."

ALONSO ARMSTRONG

Blue glowed from his toes and his laced fingers.

He faded to the lone place he'd linger.

Of all his loves, he chose the one from Earth.

Falling upon rich greenness in ardor,

And though above ten yards beneath his feet,

Alonso beheld his love Alexei

Angelic from that angle to his eye.

Moreno stood with Paul making fish fry.

The two made friends on crossing paths again

And dined or fished together now and then.

They drank, frying a summer solstice feast.

"A man's come here to greet you, over east,"

Paul said, "Looks like he's got lots on his mind."

Paul elbowed Alexei to gesture toward

The beaming blue figure who he adored.

Armstrong landed in Paul's yard and approached,

Waving his hand so as to not encroach.

He asked, "Alexei, are you glad we met?"

Did we impact each other like comets,

Or did I misinterpret us as more?"

"You left fucking craters because before,  
I thought people would hate the guts of me,  
Not that they just might like my qualities."

"You have most interesting qualities,  
And a magnetic personality."

"Alonso, of all loves you're at the top.  
I'll tell you now, this fish fry's my first stop.  
I'm traveling places like Greece and Spain."

"I can't say that I've ever been to Spain."

"Lots of people have never been to Spain.

I want to see blue beaches in the rain."

"I'm glad for you to see and feel new things,"

As he adapted to his heart's stinging,  
Armstrong supposed ardor would have to wait.  
Such things occur on summer solstice days.